



20 23

CITY OF FALLS CHURCH YEAR IN REVIEW

*Government, Residents, and Businesses
Working Together to Improve our Community*



CITY OF
**FALLS
CHURCH**

75
Years



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A MESSAGE FROM THE CITY MANAGER

Dear City of Falls Church Residents and Businesses,

As we approach the end of 2023, it is useful to consider some the achievements we have been able to make together as a community. This 2023 Year in Review is organized around the key goals set out in the City Comprehensive Plan and the City Council's two-year work plan. An annual review helps us chart progress toward a shared vision for the future.

The focus of this report is on areas of policy changes, new programs and new projects. However, most staff work and interaction with the community is centered around delivering core government services, day in and day out, with a responsive, people first approach. These core services are the foundation for the new initiatives described in this Year in Review.

This 75th Anniversary of becoming an independent City has been a year marked by growth and vitality. We thank you for your support and partnership in the City's progress.

*Sincerely,
Wyatt Shields, City Manager*

VISION 2040

"In the year 2040, the City of Falls Church is a welcoming and inclusive community – a special place in the heart of Northern Virginia. Involved citizens are key to the City's long-term success as a leader in education, environmental sustainability, multi-modal transportation, and vibrant economic development. By investing in neighborhoods, community services and facilities, schools, and parks the City preserves small-town character and history while honoring a deep commitment to progress and a growing community. The continual rejuvenation of robust commercial areas supports the City's high quality of life for all citizens."

City Comprehensive Plan





COMMUNITY

HISTORY

FRIENDSHIP

THE CITY'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY

2023 Celebration Highlights

The City of Falls Church celebrated 75 years of being a City on August 16, 2023. The event was commemorated with a City Council proclamation and a ceremonial raising of the flag outside City Hall.

The City invites the community in a year-long celebration of 75 years of community, history, and friendship. The final celebration will take place in September 2024.

► fallschurchva.gov/75Years

- August 1: Launched the official 75 Year Anniversary website, fallschurchva.gov/75Years.
- August 7: City Council proclamation
- August 16: Flag raising ceremony outside City Hall.
- September 24: Local, regional, and state representatives joined City Council members to kick-off the City's 75th Anniversary with the special logo reveal at the Falls Church Festival. Over 200 car magnets were handed out.
- October 7: During Farm Day, nearly 600 bubbles were handed out to children in celebration of the anniversary.
- November 7 through 27: The first Scavenger Hunt took place with the theme, "Then versus Now," managed by the Recreation and Parks Department. Participants received an exclusive 75 Year Anniversary magnetic chip clip
- November 27: At the annual Lighting of the Trees event, the Economic Development Office handed out candy canes and gelt in honor of the 75 Year Anniversary and Little City Gift Card program.
- December 2 and 3: At the annual Holiday Gift and Craft Show, over 250 shopping bags were handed out in honor of the anniversary.
- December 31: At the annual Watch Night New Year's Eve Celebration, a noisemaker branded with the 75 Year anniversary logo will be handed out.

SMALL TOWN CHARACTER IN AN URBAN SETTING

- Launched a year-long celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the City's incorporation. Celebration includes 75th Anniversary logo, pole banners, memorabilia, family-fun scavenger hunts, and special events.
- Hosted annual Memorial Day Parade and Festival, Independence Day Celebration, and Falls Church Festival which consistently draw thousands of attendees from the community and region.
- City Council approved the East End Small Area Plan (SAP) after extensive community engagement. The plan envisions a greener and more walkable East End while celebrating and preserving the vibrant Vietnamese culture at the Eden Center.
- City Council approved changes to the zoning code making permanent the outdoor dining facilities temporarily in place during the pandemic.
- Collaborated with The Little City CATCH Foundation to increase City support for the Watch Night New Years Eve Celebration.
- Maintained flower baskets and bowl planters in the downtown commercial district to enhance City's appeal.
- Installed holiday lighting on Broad Street with extension this year up to Haycock Road.



ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AND VITALITY

The City of Falls Church *Restaurant Week* JANUARY 19-28



- Save the date for the inaugural City of Falls Church Restaurant Week (January 19 – 28, 2024) to help restaurants recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic.
- Continued the Little City Gift Card and Bonus Card Program. Over the past two years, 6,800 gift cards were sold and 4,972 bonus cards were awarded. The bonus cards were made possible by \$250,000+ in ARPA funds.
- Began a tourism website to increase City visitor numbers and patronage to local businesses recovering from the pandemic in partnership with the Virginia Department of Tourism.
- Completed a market study on post-pandemic retail trends to identify preferred commercial uses in new developments.
- Refreshed Mr. Brown's Park, including the addition of new seating and repairs to the mural, irrigation, lighting, and masonry, to encourage downtown visitation.
- Developed parklet designs for the S. Washington St. corridor to support investment and economic activity in the area.
- Closed the sale of the Northern Virginia Center to make way for the future headquarters for HITT Contracting and home of Virginia Tech National Center for Smart Construction.
- Founder's Row theater site plan amendment and building permits approved.
- Broad and Washington with Whole Foods planned opening in fall 2024.
- Founder's Row II building permits issued, with stormwater, sanitary sewer, and streetscape infrastructure improvements underway.
- Processed application for the Quinn/Homestretch Senior Living Redevelopment project with review by City Boards and Commissions.



SAFE STREETS FOR ALL

- Completed the S. Washington/Hillwood Intersection Improvement Project with new informational panels that tell the history of the City.
- Completed the Oak Street Bridge replacement project in October, reopening to all truck and bus traffic two months ahead of schedule.
- Lowered the speed limit on most residential streets to 20 mph to promote safety for all users of City streets.
- Participated in Virginia's Division of Motor Vehicles traffic safety programs for speed, DUI, and seat belt enforcement.
- Began update to the Bike Master Plan which will set out goals for improving bike safety and access along key corridors in the City.
- Completed grant funded survey on West Falls Church (Shreve Road) bike and pedestrian path with project proceeding to Council to finalize agreement.
- Developed traffic calming solutions in the Greenway Downs neighborhood with resident participation and submitted plans to VDOT for approval.
- Updated the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program Handbook with the goal of improving the resident experience with the program.

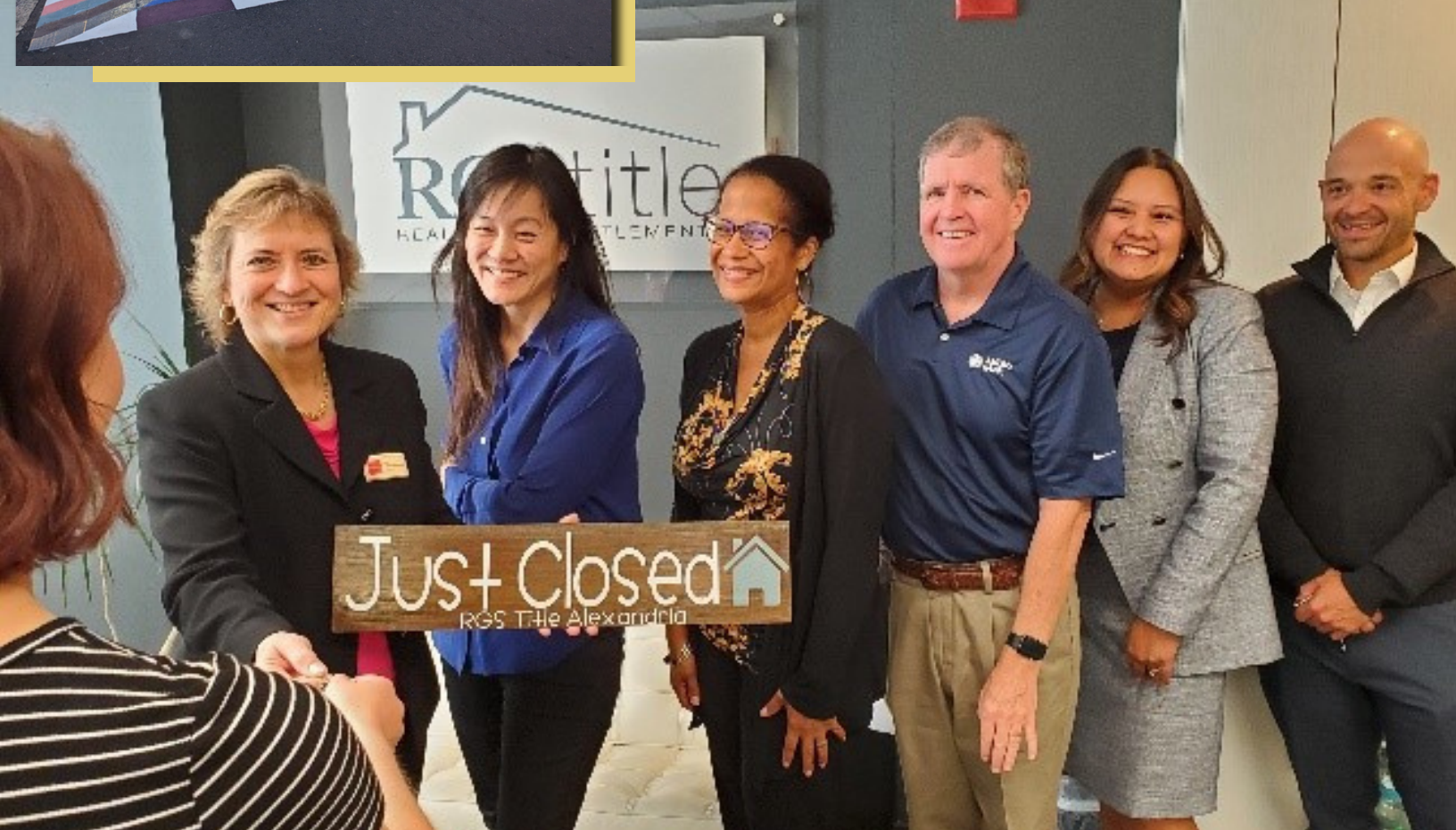


SOCIAL EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Four homeowners were welcomed into the City through the newly launched Affordable Homeownership Program, managed in collaboration with the National Housing Partnership Foundation. Six homes were purchased, given environmentally sustainable upgrades, and made available to qualified applicants.



- Added 12 new affordable housing units through the City Committed Affordable Unit program. The program supplements a portion of the rent paid directly to the landlord for lower-income households between 30% and 50% Area Median Income.
- 80 staff members were trained on using live interpretation services for community members who call or visit in person and do not speak English as their first language.



SOCIAL EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONTINUED

- Implemented the Marcus Alert System to serve community members in mental health crisis. The Police Department joined the Fairfax Falls Church Community Service Board's Behavioral Health Crisis Response Leadership Team and completed Crisis Intervention Training.
- The Library hosted a "Question of Access" discussion panel and facilitated a community conversation examining the history and impact of segregation at Falls Church and surrounding libraries.
- Over \$17,000 in scholarships awarded to community members in need for Recreation and Parks programs, helping people explore art and athletics who may have otherwise been unable to participate.
- Amended the zoning code to allow for more diverse housing options to be constructed in the City's transitional zones between commercial districts and lower density residential districts.
- Started the accreditation process to designate Aurora House as a Qualified Residential Program to increase utilization and support foster care for youth.
- Developed a partnership with a substance use expert to provide consultation and training to Aurora House staff, school personnel, Arlington Court Services staff, and psychoeducational training specifically tailored to caregivers.
- Updated the Demographics Chapter to the Comprehensive Plan which updates population and school enrollment projections.
- Served 600 City residents through distribution of Community Service Fund Grants.



PUBLIC SAFETY



- 100% of uniformed Police Officers, Sheriff's Deputies and Dispatchers have completed Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) which enhances their capabilities and awareness when encountering individual experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Police and Sheriff staff trained on effective response to an opioid overdose and have two staff members certified to teach rescuers on the use of NARCAN nasal spray.
- Partnered with the Center for Youth and Family Advocacy (CYFA) for restorative justice practices for youth and vulnerable populations.
- Completed the regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, which identifies vulnerabilities that can be addressed through emergency planning.
- Received a \$210,000 grant to upgrade the Community Center generator from diesel to natural gas, which is a more reliable, lower cost, and cleaner source of back-up power. The Community Center serves as the City's emergency shelter.
- Completed a COVID-19 After Action Report which will serve as a guide for future major public health emergencies.
- Assisted City schools in adopting "I Love You Guys" Foundation Emergency Action Plan that focuses on consistent communication during any type of emergency.
- Completed security surveys at Oak St. Elementary, Jesse Thacker, and Mt. Daniel City schools.
- Expanded fleet of electric vehicles and e-bikes used by Public Safety Aides, Police Command Staff, and Sheriff's Office to lower greenhouse gas emissions.
- Added a second School Resource Officer for City schools funded with a state grant.

PUBLIC SAFETY

CONTINUED

- City Council approved Speed Camera enforcement areas in certain school zones, with implementation in 2024.
- Completed the Trammel Branch Flood Mitigation Project.
- Completed the Wrens Branch Flood Mitigation Project.
- Sponsored two Drug Take Back Day events promoting the safe disposal of unused medications.
- Maintained a full police and sheriff staffing throughout this period of nationwide difficulty in public safety hiring and retention.
- Managed the administration of court activity, inmate transports, and civil process including a major increase in caseload.
- Continued to improve the implementation of deputy body-worn and vehicle cameras to promote personnel and public safety, transparency, and accountability.
- Promoted public safety and community trust building through child seat safety inspections, Touch-a-Truck Events, school and church visits, station and facility tours, community presentations, and Coffee with a Cop visits.
- Conducted emergency response training for schools, the faith community, and apartment and condo associations to plan for natural and man-made disasters.
- Supported regional events such as the Marine Corp Marathon and the Army Ten Miler.
- Sherriff and Police provided personnel, equipment, planning, and public safety support for all City events including the MLK, Jr. March, Watch Night, Tinner Hill Music Festival, Memorial Day Parade, community and school walk, bike, and runs, holiday events, and the Fourth of July Fireworks Celebration.




ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Completed the Government Operations Energy Action Plan, which outlines steps the City and Schools can take in its operations to help meet the community's greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals. The plan was unanimously adopted by City Council in July 2023 and the School Board in August 2023.
- Completed the Community Energy Action Plan, which identifies ways the City government can help residents and businesses reduce their emissions in support of the community's goals; the plan was adopted by City Council in November 2023.
- Schools completed installation of solar array to power Meridian High School.
- Schools and Department of Public Works installed charging infrastructure to support the two new electric school busses with more on the way.
- Implemented a new fee structure for the public electric vehicle charging stations at City Hall that balances promotion of EVs (first hour free), recuperates costs to the City (\$/kWh), and ensures availability for users (parking fee after charging complete).
- Implemented new energy management software with EnergyCAP, which will support tracking and analysis of energy use in City and school buildings and track progress in reducing carbon emissions.
- Purchased solar Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) to cover 100% of the general government's electricity use.
- Replaced end of life sport court lighting at Cherry Hill Park, Cavalier Trail Park, and in conjunction with the schools, the courts at Meridian High school. The new lights are LED with lower power usage and less spillover.



EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

COMMUNITY SATISFACTION SURVEY

 **89%**
Quality of Life
Rating

 **72%**
Community Building
Performance

 **90%**
Library Approval
Rating

City rated higher on services than the average regional benchmark.

79%
Street
Maintenance

89%
Parks and
Trails

- Maintained AAA bond ratings from S&P, Moody, and Fitch agencies.
- Completed banking transition by moving funds to City's new bank – JPMorgan Chase and saving over \$400,000 in banking fees.
- Initiated taxpayer outreach to promote tax due dates resulting in increased collections.
- Expanded weekend hours at the library, pushing back closing times each day from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. to better meet community needs.
- Library won the 2023 Outstanding Website Award from the Virginia Public Library Directors Association.
- Named America Star Library by Library Journal Magazine for the 14th time in 15 years. The library was one of six libraries in Virginia to receive this designation.
- Adopted a library FY24-FY28 Strategic Plan focused on "Supporting Community. Inspiring Discovery. Promoting Literacy."
- Developed a new zoning webpage with improved public interface and published residential permitting information, pamphlets, and guidance.
- Expanded the use of "switch-and-go" trucks in Public Works for a reduced fleet size and maintenance workload.
- Increased the use of stormwater best management practices, leveraging in-house resources to complete inspections and enforcement.



EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

PUBLIC MEETINGS AND COMMUNICATIONS

- The City Council held 26 regular meetings and work sessions, 28 committee meetings, 25 mayor's meetings, and 11 City Council "Office Hours" meetings.
- Council approved 12 Ordinances and 26 Resolutions, which included budget adoption, rebalance of voting precincts, establishment of the long-term outdoor dining process, lowering the speed limit on City streets, and support for local and regional human services programs.
- Responded to 140 Freedom of Information Act requests.
- Issued over 31 Proclamations reinforcing the welcoming nature of the City and its respect for different heritages and identities; spotlighting Falls Church City Public School students, acknowledging the City's past history and growth, recognizing those working to ensure the safety of the community within the City; supporting environmental sustainability; and providing a platform for community issues.



142

Boards and
Commissions
Public Meetings



31,921

Social Media
Followers



2,788

Weekly
Newsletter
Subscribers



EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

INVESTMENT IN WORKFORCE

- Department Heads and Constitutional Officers completed a 12-month leadership curriculum with the University of Virginia's Virginia Institute of Government (VIG).
- 28 employees completed Supervisor Academy for professional development.
- Partnered with Northern Virginia Community College - NOVA Workforce for employee learning and professional development.
- Treasury and Library staff completed cash handling training organized through the Women in Public Finance organization.
- Treasury staff earned the Master Governmental Deputy Treasurer Certification through the Treasurer's Association of Virginia.
- Streamlined recruitment and updated the on-boarding process for new hires.
- Completed staff safety training for Library, City Hall, and Property Yard.
- Three employees certified as diversity equity inclusion and belonging (DEIB) facilitators.





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75
Years



The City of Falls Church is committed to the letter and spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request a reasonable accommodation for any type of disability, call 571-402-9102 (TTY 711).

fallschurchva.gov

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